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General Assembly

Official Records

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

261 st meeting

Thursday, 29 November 2001, 10.30 a.m.

New York

Chairman: Mr. Fall ..... (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Today the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is holding a solemn meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome Mr. Han Seung-soo, President of the General Assembly; Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations; Miss Mignonette Patricia Durrant, President of the Security Council; Mr. John de Saram, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine; and Mr. Danilo Türk, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. I wish also to welcome representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, and all others who have kindly accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this solemn meeting.

I now invite everyone present to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of all those who have given their lives for the cause of the Palestinian people and for the return of peace in the region.

The participants observed a minute of silence.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Please allow me at this point to make a statement on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Moved by the enduring sense of shared responsibility that brings us together every year in the same Chamber and on the same date — a feeling rekindled by the recent events that have transformed this 29 November 2001 — the Committee, through me, thanks the President of the General Assembly, the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General for having come here to commemorate with us the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Naturally, our thanks go also to the representatives of Member States, of observers, of various bodies of the United Nations system, of intergovernmental organizations and of civil society, who have as usual joined us in friendship.

Over the past year, a perturbed, powerless, resigned world has witnessed a disturbing deterioration of the situation on the ground which has led to a marked deterioration in the peace process.

Fourteen months of clashes, abuses and tragedy have caused a thousand, mostly Palestinian, deaths, including children and the elderly, and as many casualties. Since 28 September 2000, the inflexible occupying force has imposed its law; there have been

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bloody raids in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem. There has been massive destruction of property; new settlements have been established and old ones extended. There has been military occupation, the closing of cities and merciless blockades. In short, these acts have paralyzed economic activity, and they have caused suffering, uprooting and rebellion, thus destroying any tenuous trust that might have been built between the parties.

On many occasions, the Committee — not without frustration — has expressed its deep concern at this resurgence of violence, which has led to desolation, which has violated agreements and which has subjected the Palestinian people to unbearable suffering, humiliation and collective punishment in a recurring cycle of violence and blind or targeted reprisal.

At a time when the international community is rightly committed to the world coalition against terrorism, there is a growing desire and a renewed hope that a number of the conflicts that have persisted for many years will finally receive equally determined, intensive and holistic treatment. In that connection, over the past few weeks, the Committee has welcomed signs of progress in a renewed peace process. It welcomed the meeting between Mr. Arafat and Mr. Peres, which helped reaffirm the importance of a ceasefire.

More fundamental and helpful is the fact that the need to establish an independent Palestinian State has been publicly acknowledged by the United States and by the European Union. And fortunately, that subject is no longer taboo in Israel, even at the highest State levels. In the view of the General Assembly and of the Security Council, the very core of the issues besetting Israeli-Arab relations is the Palestinian question, which is so central that it has been recognized that the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions is a prerequisite for a lasting solution to the Middle East crisis.

In that light, the Committee continues to support the praiseworthy efforts in the region of representatives of the United States, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations to knit the threads of dialogue and to encourage the parties to implement the recommendations of the Mitchell fact-finding mission established at Sharm el-Sheikh. Here, the content and tone of the statement made at Louisville, Kentucky, by the Secretary of State of the United States give us reason for hope. Mr. Colin Powell set out a positive, unambiguous and balanced picture of the peace process and of its ultimate goal. It is now up to the Israelis and the Palestinians resolutely to join in this new momentum. In this process we must not lose sight of the fact that any settlement of the Palestinian question, in the light of the Middle East conflict, must be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which establish the principle of land for peace. This has been reaffirmed by the Security Council in its resolution 1322 (2000) and by the General Assembly in its resolution ES-10/7, adopted at its tenth emergency special session.

The Committee urges Israel strictly to abide by those resolutions and by the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949. Let me stress the importance we attach to the forthcoming 5 December meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention to consider the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Peace will not prosper and regional development will not be secured if the Israelis and the Palestinians — who must learn to live together — fail in their attempts to forge relations of trust as sovereign States within secure and internationally recognized boundaries.

The United Nations must remain seized of the Palestinian question until it has been genuinely settled in all its aspects. The Security Council must respond without further delay. It must take more vigorous action and must shoulder all its responsibilities. Here, the Committee and I are gratified by the outstanding, visible role being played by the Secretary-General and his Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, with the assistance of the co-sponsors, in setting the parties back on the right path. Along with the Secretary-General, the Presidents of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council deserve our thanks for having helped create new momentum in the peace process. Moreover, their presence here today is further proof of their interest in the work of the Committee and of the fact that they are closely following the Palestinian question.

I take this opportunity once again to express our gratitude to Kofi Annan for his tireless efforts to find peace in the Middle East, as reflected in his determined

and crucial support for the Committee. I pay tribute to that Nobel Peace Prize winner and, through him, to all those who serve the United Nations, first and foremost his dedicated staff and aides.

The Committee welcomes the effective participation of representatives, many of whose heads of State or Government, along with leaders of organizations, have been kind enough to send messages of support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people. I welcome to this meeting high-level representatives of the League of Arab States, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Organization of African Unity, the Non-Aligned Movement and other institutions with which the Committee intends to pursue and intensify fruitful cooperation on the Palestinian issue. I hope that these plenipotentiaries and all our partners will accept my warmest thanks and my brotherly affection, as well as the deepest gratitude of the Committee.

I call upon participants to urge the international community to intensify its participation in our joint effort to bring about a resumption of the peace process. The Committee urges, in particular, the co-sponsors and other concerned Governments, the United Nations, other intergovernmental organizations and civil society groups and institutions to remain actively committed and unanimously to support the noble cause of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

On behalf of my colleagues on the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I affirm our unceasing commitment to this sacred cause. To ensure that it triumphs, we shall work together tirelessly and with dedication and perseverance. History has taught us that at the worst moments of anguish and doubt there are always fruitful periods of peace and rebirth. Nations know this well, as does the community of suffering peoples, who find in their hope for a better future reason to bear the upheaval of an unbearable present, which also partakes of mankind's irreversible progress towards the light.

Once again, I am very thankful for the kind presence here of so many participants which reflects their friendship and solidarity. The sunshine will soon light up the glistening banks of the Middle East; the light of peace is already shining its first rays of hope on the bloodied but triply blessed soil of Palestine.

It is now my honour to give the floor to Mr. Han Seung-soo, President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Han (Republic of Korea), President of the General Assembly: I am very pleased to take part in this commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and to address this solemn meeting in my capacity as President of the General Assembly.

The General Assembly, recognizing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and supporting their aspirations to realize those rights, adopted its resolution 32/40 B in December 1977, in which it declared that 29 November should be observed as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Ever since then, this day has become an annual occasion for the international community to renew its commitment to promote the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people within the framework of lasting peace and prosperity in the region. Indeed, it is one of the most urgent and daunting tasks of the United Nations to bring lasting peace and economic prosperity to the Middle East region, and in particular to the Palestinian people.

The 1991 Middle East peace conference, followed by the signing of the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, was warmly welcomed by the international community as a sign of hope and an indication of political courage and of a genuine desire to achieve peace and stability in the region. However, failure to implement these signed agreements and the steady deterioration of the situation on the ground led to an outbreak of violence in late September 2000. Ever since then, we have seen a spiral of violence and an increasing number of casualties, which have led to a complete breakdown in peace negotiations.

At the beginning of the violence last year, the General Assembly, at its resumed tenth emergency special session, adopted resolution ES-10/7, reaffirming that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region should be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which embody the principle of land for peace.

Our wish is that the Palestinian people will soon be able to exercise its inalienable rights, as called for numerous times by the General Assembly — namely, the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and

sovereignty and the right to return to their homes and properties or to receive compensation for those not choosing to return. The lesson we have learned from the violence prevailing in the region since last year is that there is no alternative to the process of Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations based on international law and on principles of mutual respect and understanding of each other's needs and interests.

I believe, in that regard, that the recommendations of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee should serve as a road map for guiding the parties concerned back to the negotiating table. I therefore urge the parties to faithfully comply with the recommendations of that Committee.

Peace and economic development are inextricably linked. Without economic development, peace is fragile. In that sense, I believe that the international donor community plays a very constructive role in providing a solid basis for lasting peace in the Middle East region. I encourage the donor community to continue and, indeed, to increase its economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

As it has done for many years, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East continues to play a vital role through its essential relief services. The Agency should be assisted in all possible ways by the donor community in order to meet the growing needs of the Palestinian refugees.

This very afternoon the Assembly will take up the item entitled "Question of Palestine", and I look forward to a lively and constructive discussion. As President of the General Assembly, I would like to reiterate the Assembly's position that the United Nations has a special responsibility regarding the question of Palestine until it is effectively resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. It is incumbent upon all of us to see to it that that objective is attained.

On this commemorative Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, I assure participants that in my capacity as President, and as a professional economist who served on secondment to the World Bank as a financial adviser to the Government of Jordan from 1974 to 1976, I will do my utmost to contribute to the peace and prosperity of the Middle East region and of the Palestinian people.

Let me take this opportunity to welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General, his Special Coordinator, the co-sponsors of the peace process and the European Union, to resume and normalize the peace process.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The Committee continues to take the lead in promoting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and supporting the peace process. In implementing the important mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, the Committee has made, and continues to make, an important contribution towards peace, security and stability in the Middle East.

I wish the Committee every success in its mission.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I now have the honour to give the floor to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan.

The Secretary-General: Let me begin by congratulating His Excellency Ambassador Papa Louis Fall on his unanimous election last September as the new Chairman of this Committee. Your election, Mr. Chairman, reflects the Committee's appreciation, which I share, of your devotion and that of your country, Senegal, to the quest for peace in the Middle East and to the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights.

We meet at a critical time for the Middle East and the world. Escalating violence and significant loss of life, mostly Palestinian, but also Israeli, have increased mutual mistrust and animosity between the two communities and have undermined efforts to bridge and reconcile the two communities.

Since the Sharm el-Sheikh summit of October 2000, international and regional actors have made repeated efforts to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. Earlier this year, the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, chaired by former United States Senator George Mitchell, provided a balanced and sensible set of recommendations which, if implemented, would lead the parties from confidence-building steps to substantive negotiations.

A ceasefire is now desperately needed. This would also be in accordance with the understandings on security-related issues reached under the auspices of

the United States Director of Central Intelligence, George Tenet. I believe that full implementation of the Mitchell recommendations offers the best route to a peaceful solution based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on the principle of land for peace.

The horrific terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 have had a profound impact on events all over the world. In the case of the Middle East, there is a renewed sense of urgency to find a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine. I was encouraged to hear President Arafat and Foreign Minister Peres restate their commitment to security cooperation and dialogue at their meeting in late September. However, developments since then, in particular the assassination of an Israeli cabinet minister, Rehavam Ze'evi, and the Israeli Defence Force's incursion into areas under Palestinian control, have made the situation even worse. The engagement of the international community — in particular the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union, the United Nations and Member States including Egypt and Jordan — remains vital.

It is also essential now for the parties to preserve the achievements of the peace process and to do all they can to regain the path of peace and reconciliation. Both parties must realize that violence and the excessive use of force are the enemies of progress. I share the hopes expressed by President Bush and United States Secretary of State Powell that the Israeli occupation will soon end and that two States — Israel and Palestine — will before long live side by side in peace, with mutual respect and security. To this end, the expansion of settlements, assassinations, all acts of terrorism, economic blockades and incursions into autonomous areas should cease immediately.

The crisis of the past 14 months has had a catastrophic effect on the Palestinian economy. Repeated border and internal closures have led to a dramatic deterioration in living conditions and considerably increased unemployment and poverty rates, adding to the general sense of despair, frustration and anger felt by the Palestinians. The international donor community has provided much-needed budgetary support to the Palestinian Authority and its institutions, and essential emergency relief to the Palestinian population. Further support will shortly be needed.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East continues to play a central role in responding to the rising needs of the refugee community. The United Nations Development Programme and many other United Nations agencies are also active on the ground. Donor assistance remains vital, especially now, at a time of crisis and severe economic hardship.

In addition, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, has been working very closely with the parties and with representatives of the international community in the region to support the peace process and to coordinate international assistance in the areas of emergency relief and development.

For my part, I will continue to work with all parties until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine is achieved based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. At the start of the new millennium, the Palestinian people should finally be allowed to exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and to a State of their own.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his personal efforts to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. I express once again my thanks to him for his support of the Committee's work.

I now give the floor to Miss Mignonette Patricia Durrant, President of the Security Council.

Miss Durrant (Jamaica), President of the Security Council: At the outset, I wish to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the kind invitation extended to me, in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of November, to participate in this annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This is a very special event, through which all of us in the international community demonstrate our solidarity with the Palestinian people and our commitment to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine in accordance with United Nations resolutions.

The question of Palestine was first placed on the agenda of the United Nations more than half a century

ago. Throughout that period, the United Nations has worked to resolve this issue. The Security Council, for its part, has been involved in the endeavour. Today, two of the Council's resolutions — resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — are universally recognized as the bases for any durable solution to this question and constitute the foundation of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. It is important to note that practically all agreements and understandings reached by the two sides as part of the Oslo process make clear reference to those landmark resolutions.

It is very disturbing indeed that the past year has been marked by a considerable and rapid increase in violence, as a result of which hundreds have lost their lives and thousands have suffered injuries. It would be irresponsible and totally unacceptable to allow this situation to continue indefinitely. A concerted and well-coordinated effort by all concerned is required to check the hostilities and stop the suffering and the continuation of violence.

In the course of the past year, we in the Council have followed with great concern the situation on the ground. It may be recalled that the Council met on a number of occasions to discuss measures aimed at putting an end to violence and at resuming the bilateral negotiations. Because it had been a particularly difficult year, the Council was encouraged by a number of diplomatic initiatives aimed at reaching a ceasefire and breathing air into the peace negotiations. The members of the Council were of the view that the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee and the Tenet understandings offered a practicable and reasonable way to reduce the level of violence, achieve a ceasefire and resume the peace dialogue.

As the crisis persisted, additional efforts were deployed by various international parties. In particular, the Council welcomed the statement issued on 25 October of this year by representatives of the European Union, the United States and the Russian Federation in the region and the United Nations Special Coordinator. The Council strongly supported that initiative as an important opportunity to prevent a further escalation of violence and the disintegration of the accomplishments of the peace process. The members of the Council are also hopeful that the position statement made by the United States Secretary of State, Mr. Colin Powell, on 19 November will allow the parties to overcome the deep-seated sense of mutual suspicion and mistrust and help them return to the negotiating table. In order to do that, the parties should unequivocally reaffirm their commitment to the bilateral agreements reached to date and demonstrate, through a tangible effort on the ground, the will to implement those agreements.

The Council will remain fully engaged, and it stands ready to assist the two sides through this critical period. We welcomed and strongly supported the highly instrumental and increasingly important peacemaking role played by the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. His leadership role, his personal involvement in all aspects of the issue in the course of the past year and his close participation with the members of the Council have been most helpful and have enjoyed the great respect of the parties.

In spite of the enormous obstacles of the past year or so, the Council is hopeful today that the two sides will indeed be able to move forward along the road of reconciliation, putting bitterness and anger behind them. That is the only realistic way to forge a strong partnership for peace. Both sides should realize that their own future and that of their children rests in their hands. Working towards peaceful coexistence and good-neighbourliness will require a great deal of personal and political courage, wisdom and far-sightedness.

The Security Council highly values the close involvement of the international community in assisting the parties out of the impasse and in facilitating the continuation of the peace dialogue. We are also gratified by the vigorous economic and other assistance provided to the Palestinian people by the donor community and organizations, including the United Nations, and we stress the importance of coherent and sustained involvement by all concerned in this undertaking.

On behalf of all the members of the Council, allow me to assure the Committee that the Security Council will continue to exercise its responsibilities under the Charter as regards the question of Palestine. We shall remain strongly committed to the goal of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East for the benefit of all the parties concerned.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, who will read out a message from Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation

Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour and pleasure to read out the following message from Chairman Yasser Arafat on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People:

> "On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to convey to the Committee and to the international community as well as to the United Nations and the peoples of the world our deepest appreciation for the significant and influential role they are playing in the protection of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as well as for providing support of all kinds for the just Palestinian cause and for increasing its prominence among the issues of the contemporary world.
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> "The continued United Nations commemoration of the International Day and the fact that this annual meeting falls on the occasion of the adoption of the resolution on the partition of Palestine into two States, the State of Palestine and the State of Israel, reflects the wise vision of the international community with regard to the importance of establishing the State of Palestine as a basic element of international security and stability. It also reflects the credibility of the resolutions of international legality, whose implementation in the Middle East has been obstructed, especially General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III), and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). That has kept our region in an ongoing state of turmoil and instability that has in turn continued to threaten international stability on the whole. On this occasion, I would like to reiterate on behalf of the Palestinian people that international legality will continue to be the legal and political point of reference for the resolution of all regional conflicts throughout the world, and of the issue of Palestine in particular.
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> "The issue of Palestine is the quintessence of the Middle East conflict for all Muslims and Christians the world over, because Palestine is a holy land and because of the dangers, acts of aggression and difficulties to which its Christian and Islamic holy places have been subjected as a result of Israeli occupation, and Israel's greedy expansionist and settlement policies and attempts to Judaize and commit aggression against Christian and Islamic holy places.
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> "I would like to recall here that, in accordance with international legality, the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people require that an end be put to Israeli occupation and colonization of our land, Palestine. It also requires the confirmation of the right of return of refugees, the exercise by the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination, the establishment of an independent State with holy Jerusalem as its capital, and the protection of Christian and Muslin holy places. Realizing those rights on the ground requires more active intervention by the United Nations and by the Security Council. Such intervention would provide serious support for ongoing efforts to resume the peace process and to place it back on the right track so that it can achieve the desired permanent and just peace in the Middle East.
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> "The escalating cycle of violence in our region is due principally to Israel's aggression. The consequences of that escalation include more than 1,800 martyrs killed and more than 37,000 wounded; military escalation; an economic, financial and medical siege; the destruction of many facilities, homes, wells, factories and roads; the uprooting of trees and crops; and the expropriation of Palestinian funds. All of this must be stopped as a matter of urgency by providing our people with immediate international protection, as the human and economic casualties caused by Israeli aggression have already exceeded all bounds.
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> "The time has come for effective international intervention to effect the implementation of resolutions of international legality and to stop the policy of double standards, which has severely damaged the international Organization and the effectiveness with which its resolutions have been implemented over the decades.
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> "At a time when I am calling upon the United Nations to work to strengthen

international legality and resolutions, I would like to assure the international community once again of our people's strategic choice for just and lasting peace — a peace of the brave that provides security and stability for Israelis and Palestinians, as well as for the other peoples of the region. We will continue to extend a hand to consolidate that peace for the sake of our children and grandchildren in the two States of Palestine and Israel. If destiny has so far precluded the birth of our State since the adoption of the partition plan in 1948, then the facts that have emerged and the lessons that have been learned over more than half a century affirm the inevitability of the speedy establishment of our independent State, with holy Jerusalem as its capital.

"That is the natural right of our people to self-determination. It is the deepest and most solid guarantee of security and stability in the Middle East, especially since the important speech made by President Bush at the opening of the current session of the General Assembly with regard to an independent Palestinian State. That speech was followed by the joint meeting held between the "quartet" of the United States, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations on this issue. Thereafter came the explanatory speech delivered by the United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, on the same issue and on the immediate implementation of the Tenet understandings and the Mitchell report. That report recalled the importance of quickly dispatching monitors to implement the recommendations, together with international observers, and of cooperating on this with our Arab brothers and with the efforts of friendly States throughout the world.

"I would like to pay tribute to the Committee once again, and express my appreciation for its sincere efforts to protect the inalienable rights of our people. I would like to express my appreciation for its remarkable efforts to bring about a permanent, comprehensive and just peace in the region and in the land of peace — the blessed land of Palestine — because it is a cornerstone of stability in the Middle East and throughout the world.

"We shall stand together, until we return to Al-Quds Al-Sharif, with God's help."

The message was signed by Yasser Arafat, President of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, President of the Palestinian National Authority, Ramallah, 29 November 2001.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I ask the Permanent Observer of Palestine to convey to His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority, our greetings and our thanks for his eloquent message. On behalf of all of us, I extend to Chairman Arafat our solidarity with and steadfast support for the Palestinian people in its quest for self-determination and statehood. I would also like to assure Chairman Arafat and, through him, the Palestinian people, of the Committee's resolute determination to continue its efforts, in accordance with the mandate bestowed upon it by the General Assembly, to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine.

I shall now suspend the meeting briefly to allow some of our guests to leave. On behalf of the Committee, I would like once again to thank the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements, which were reassuring and important on several levels.

The meeting was suspended at 11.30 a.m. and resumed at 11.40 a.m.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I call now on His Excellency Mr. John de Saram, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka) Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: To the Palestinian people, I have the honour to convey profound respects and good wishes.

There are two principal channels through which the circumstances of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories are each year brought to the attention of the General Assembly. The Committee on

the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is one. The Special Committee on Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories is the other.

I have the honour to be Chairman of the Special Committee on Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. It is in that capacity that I speak and it is to the findings of the Special Committee that I shall today refer.

The Special Committee, at the conclusion of its visit to the region at the end of May last year, was of the view that, notwithstanding the very depressing circumstances in the occupied Palestinian territories, there was still, amongst some of the Palestinians whom we met with and who made statements to the Special Committee last year, glimmers of hope that developments in the peace process might possibly, in the not too distant future, lead to tangible improvements in the unfortunate conditions in which the Palestinians in the occupied territories live out their lives.

There were, however, the tragic occurrences of the closing days of September 2000 in East Jerusalem and the ensuing engulfing violence in the occupied territories, which still continues. The only conclusion that now seems possible to the Special Committee is that the occupation of and the circumstances prevailing in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza — the unrelenting cycle of violence and counter-violence and violence and counter-violence — are not conducive to the observance, nor indeed to the recognition of human rights.

The Special Committee has, in its annual reports to the General Assembly, called attention to the existence in the occupied territories of systems of civilian and military control — laws, regulations, administrative procedures and discretionary practices — that are elaborate, extensive, discriminatory and, during periods of tension, oppressive.

The Special Committee has sought in its reports to the General Assembly to convey as full a sense as possible of the present very troubling conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories. Such conditions are not in accord with contemporary human rights standards and obligations nor with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

The conditions of the Palestinians in refugee camps, the Special Committee was informed, were particularly distressing. They had no means of subsistence outside the refugee camps and, when there is a state of siege imposed and the Palestinians in refugee camps are unable to obtain employment outside the camps, they and their families are without any subsistence resource; and we can imagine what such conditions of utter hopelessness mean for parents and children. The sad and depressing reality is that, in the harsh conditions of the occupied territories, the human rights of the Palestinians are being ignored.

Until such time as the peace process is satisfactorily concluded, surely all should agree that it is of the greatest importance that contemporary human rights standards and obligations and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention be fully recognized and honoured; and it is surely only in that way that the high tensions now prevailing in the occupied territories can be lowered.

The Special Committee was informed that the overall consequences of such a manner of occupation have been catastrophic on the occupied territories as a whole: disruption of trade and employment and the ensuing general poverty; disruption in the provision of health services; disruption in schools and in the lives of children; disruption in the provision of public services; disruption in the education and lives of children; parents distraught and depressed; inadequacy of public revenues; and an all-pervasive cloud of frustration, desperation and hopelessness that appears to have enveloped the occupied territories.

It is unquestionable that there is a yearning for peace on the part of all the Palestinians who addressed the Special Committee. For peace to be achieved, there has, of course, to be a return to the peace process.

May I conclude my statement, on behalf of all the members of the Special Committee — Ambassador Diallo, the Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations at Geneva; Ambassador Hasmy Agam, the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations in New York; and myself, the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations in New York — with these words: We hope and pray that there will soon be a return to the processes of dialogue and peace. The direct and

indirect consequences of a general occupation of peoples and territories for such an extraordinarily long period of time are traumatic in the most profound ways across the entire spectrum of human relationships affecting so unhappily the occupied and the occupier as well.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador De Saram for his important statement and for having referred to Ambassador Diallo, who, I wish to point out, is present here today representing Senegal. As members know, Ambassador Diallo was one of my predecessors in the chairmanship of this Committee. I welcome her back.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to His Excellency Mr. Dumisani Shadrack Kumalo, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, in his capacity as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): I have the honour of reading out a message from President Mbeki in his capacity as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The message reads as follows:

> "On behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, I extend our warm greetings to all Palestinians on this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Perhaps more than ever before, the international community is in an important period of history filled with opportunities to translate the hopes of the people of Palestine into reality. In this regard, the Non-Aligned Movement welcomes the positive statements and actions of the United States of America, the European Union, other European countries and the Arab League in assisting Israel and Palestine to rekindle the Middle East peace process.
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> "The Non-Aligned Movement welcomes the emerging international consensus on the need to create an independent Palestinian State based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. Indeed, this emerging consensus reaffirms the Movement's long-standing principled position calling for the creation of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. The achievement of these ideals will meet the aspirations of the people of Palestine and will bring about a lasting and comprehensive peace to the Middle East.
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> "But the tragic events of the last year demonstrate that a lot more needs to be done to lift the hopes of the Palestinian people. In the past year, the international community has witnessed a dramatic deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its condemnation of the excessive use of force by Israel towards the Palestinians, the incursions into and the reoccupation of Palestinian-controlled territory and institutions, in particular Orient House, the extrajudicial killings, the continuing expansion and building of settlements, the blockades and other forms of collective punishment.
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> "We wish to reiterate our common conviction that a just and lasting peace can only be achieved through peaceful negotiations. The full implementation of the recommendations of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, which produced the Mitchell report, provides a good basis for the parties to take the necessary steps to bring violence to an end. The deployment of a credible international presence or monitoring mechanism in the occupied Palestinian territory is necessary to verify the implementation of agreements.
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> "The Movement is pleased with the reconvening on 5 December 2001 of the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, known as the Fourth Geneva Convention, on measures to enforce the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. In that regard, the Non-Aligned Movement urges Israel to make every effort to fulfil its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention.
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> "Lastly, we wish to restate the Movement's principled position that the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine;

the Movement commends the role played by the Secretary-General in the peace process.

"To all our Palestinian brothers and sisters, the Non-Aligned Movement wishes to reaffirm that your struggle is for a legitimate cause and that your suffering should not be allowed to drag on any longer. The Non-Aligned Movement recommits itself to assisting in achieving a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I should like to ask Mr. Kumalo to convey to His Excellency Mr. Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa and Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Committee's sincere thanks for his very important message.

It is now my pleasure to give the floor to Mr. Moctar Ouane, Permanent Representative of Mali, who will read out a statement from His Excellency Mr. Modibo Sidibe, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Mali, in his capacity as Chairman of the twenty-eighth session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Ouane (Mali) (*spoke in French*): It is my privilege to read out the message of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

"Every year on 29 November the international community celebrates the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 1997, as an expression of its determination to support the just struggle of the Palestinian people to regain all its inalienable rights.

"On this occasion, I am pleased to express the high regard of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and of all its member States for the United Nations, its organs and its committees for their efforts to promote and advance the Palestinian cause and for their tireless support for the Palestinian people in their just struggle to regain their inalienable national rights.

"This year, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People occurs at a time when Israel is continuing and intensifying its aggression against the Palestinian people, who are without weapons and who have already paid a heavy price for the intifidah, with some 1,000 martyrs and 40,000 people injured.

"Israel continues blatantly to violate daily the international conventions and commitments, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949. It carries out premeditated extrajudicial killings of Palestinian activists and leaders and harassment operations that have targeted hundreds of others. The Israeli occupier also systematically demolishes Palestinian homes and other buildings. Entire neighbourhoods have been completely destroyed and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been reduced to the status of refugees in their own countries.

"For two years Israel has also been imposing a very strict blockade at border crossings, thus blocking the movement of Palestinians, as well as of supplies and medical equipment. Hundreds of military blockades are isolating villages, and even neighbourhoods within the same municipality. Israeli occupation forces have also set up a real policy of apartheid in occupied Jerusalem.

"Dozens of blockades have been set up and trenches have been dug around the city to prevent the faithful from going to mosques and churches: places of worship which are daily desecrated in acts of interference. The occupation of Palestinian towns and cities; repeated incursions; constant attacks on homes, economic facilities and schools; the systematic destruction of infrastructure; the blocking of funds belonging to the Palestinian Authority; and virtual paralysis in public life: these have all severely damaged the Palestinian economy, which is on the verge of collapse. Israel continues its delaying tactics with respect to implementing agreements that have been reached, in spite of international efforts to put an end to its aggression, which is now in its second year. Not only does Israel refuse to implement the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee and the Tenet agreements; it continues and steps up its aggression in an attempt to overthrow the Palestinian Authority, and openly pursues plans to murder Mr. Arafat and other Palestinian leaders.

"The international community, which has shown its solidarity against terrorism, must not shut its eyes to the State terrorism practised by Israel, which is a source of tension posing a threat not only to regional stability but also to international peace and security. It is therefore imperative to act immediately to put an end to ongoing and intensifying Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, to oblige Israel to respect agreements it has signed, and to ensure respect for resolutions of international legality.

"Here, we cannot fail to note with satisfaction the new United States policy with respect to the establishment of a Palestinian State and to ending the Israeli occupation. It now remains to give concrete effect to that approach; mechanisms are needed to compel Israel to end its aggression and immediately to resume the peace negotiations at the point where they was halted and on the basis of what had already been achieved in order to put a permanent end to occupation and to give the Palestinian people their freedom and enable them to enjoy all their national rights.

"In that connection, the Organization of the Islamic Conference stresses that the only way to halt the deterioration of the situation and to ease tension in the Middle East is, first, to put an immediate end to ongoing Israeli aggression, to end the blockades and sieges imposed on the Palestinian people and to resume peace negotiations from the point at which they were halted, in line with the principles that made it possible to convene the Madrid Conference, including the principle of land for peace, and in line with resolutions of international legality, specifically Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

"The second requirement is to guarantee complete Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian territories, including the occupied city of Al-Quds, and a return to the lines of 4 June 1967.

"The third is to put an end to the presence of Israeli settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories, and to halt all Israeli plans to build more settlements and to send more settlers; these acts are a flagrant violation of international law and of relevant United Nations resolutions including those of the Security Council.

"Fourthly, there must be an equitable solution of the problem of Palestinian refugees on the basis of international resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III), ensuring the return of those refugees to their cities and towns and the restoration of their property.

"Finally, we must see the creation of a completely independent Palestinian State with sovereignty over all the occupied Palestinian territories, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

"Any initiative to find a solution to the Middle East problem and the Palestinian question must be in line with the criteria we have just set out. Otherwise, such initiatives will be doomed to failure.

"On this occasion the international community must reaffirm its solidarity with the Palestinian people; it must step up and pool its efforts to put an end to Israeli aggression and to relaunch the peace process on the basis of the principles that made it possible to begin it 10 years ago at Madrid. Moreover, it is now the duty of the international community to assist the Palestinian people, to provide all the economic and financial assistance it needs in all areas, out of solidarity with the victims of Israeli State terrorism, and to support the Palestinian Authority to enable it to rebuild its institutions, to restore what has been destroyed by the cowardly Israeli occupiers and to renew the Palestinian economy.

"I wish in conclusion, on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, to pay heartfelt tribute to the Palestinian people and to reaffirm the full support of the Islamic umma for that people and for the Palestinian National Authority in putting an end to aggression and enabling the Palestinian people once again to enjoy its inalienable rights, including its right to return, to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State of its own in its homeland, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would ask the representative of Mali to convey to His Excellency Mr. Modibo Sidibe, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Mali, in his capacity as Chairman of the twenty-eighth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important statement.

I call next on His Excellency Mr. Mwelwa C. Musambachime, Permanent Representative of Zambia to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Frederick Chiluba, President of the Republic of Zambia, in his capacity as Chairman of the Organization of African Unity.

Mr. Musambachime (Zambia): It is an honour for me to read out the text of a message from President Frederick Chiluba, current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The message reads as follows.

> "As you meet to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, allow me to state from the outset the significance of such a gathering to the peoples of Palestine and Israel and to all peace-loving nations. The people of Africa join the rest of the world in the quest for peace, unity and stability in the Middle East, a region where, we all hope, both Israel and Palestine will coexist in conditions of peace, security and prosperity as sovereign and independent States.
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> "The right of the people of Palestine to self-determination and independence is recognized by the whole international community and is well documented. In this regard, on behalf of the people of Africa, I feel honoured to have been invited, in my country's capacity as current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity, to send a message of support and solidarity to our brothers and sisters in Palestine.
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> "We all have confidence that the Israeli and Palestinian authorities will be able to resolve their differences. I know that, through our collective prayers, peace and love will prevail over hate and vengeance in the Middle East.
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> "You are no doubt aware that the Organization of African Unity has on a continuous basis expressed grave concern at the lack of a solution to the issue of Palestine and its consequent ramifications in the entire Middle East region. This concern is justified because of the serious bearing of this issue on the freedom, liberty and inalienable rights of the Palestinians, who have been asking for nothing more than their fundamental right to exist as a people.
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> "Today's solemn occasion is yet another demonstration of the international community's support for the Palestinian people. It is also an unequivocal message that the Palestinians, like everyone else, deserve the right to self-determination.
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> "It is a matter of regret that the question of Palestine, which is as old as the United Nations itself, is still on the international agenda despite our great efforts to search for an acceptable and lasting solution. It is, however, clear that the peace process in the Middle East has been undermined. There have been, for instance, a number of setbacks, due principally to increased cases of violence, which are detrimental to any peaceful resolution.
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> "I am certain that I reflect the genuine view of the African continent in stating that honest dialogue between the two parties is the only way forward. While it may appear that the prevailing political tensions, characterized by violence and killings, may be difficult to overcome, dialogue still remains the only hope for creating the necessary conditions for a lasting settlement to the problem in the Middle East.
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> "The position of my Government, and, indeed, that of the Organization of African Unity on Palestinian self-determination continues to be one of support and solidarity. It is our view that the noble vision of dialogue and peace in the Middle East must be complemented by respect for international principles and for the rule of law.
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> "The Organization of African Unity has strongly supported the Palestinian cause and will continue to do so until peace and security are attained in the Middle East. We are also happy that a consensus is emerging for the establishment of an independent state of Palestine, which will coexist with the independent State of Israel. This is the only lasting solution to the Middle East conflict. It is our hope that, sooner rather than

later, the whole world will join in celebrating peace in the Middle East, as we did when the system of apartheid was defeated in South Africa.

"I would like to conclude by stating Zambia's view and that of the Organization of African Unity that the two peoples involved are still the ultimate players in the conflict. The United Nations should, however, continue to influence global efforts towards a more stable and fair international order. The United Nations should also play a more active role in stemming the increasing hostilities between Palestine and Israel.

"It is in this regard that I wish to appeal to all States and to other interested parties to lend a strong voice of support for the promotion of dialogue and peaceful negotiations between the State of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority, notwithstanding the current political malaise in that part of the world. The international community should reaffirm its commitment to this process. To our Palestinian and Israeli brothers and sisters, we say, 'We love you and wish you all the best of luck as you forge ahead in the quest for mutual understanding in the search for lasting peace and stability in your region.'"

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I request Mr. Mwelwa Musambachime to convey to Mr. Frederick Chiluba, President of the Republic of Zambia and Chairman of the Organization of African Unity, the Committee's sincere thanks for his very important statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Hisham Abbas, chargé d'affaires for the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, who will make a statement on behalf of Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Abbas (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is a great pleasure for me to address the Committee on behalf of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which has been observed by this Committee since 1975 as an expression of its support for the legitimate national rights of the Arab Palestinian people.

I should like to convey to the Committee greetings from the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Amre Moussa, and his great appreciation for the role played by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in supporting the Palestinians. I should like also to express our appreciation in this respect.

Our commemoration today coincides with an escalation of the Israeli military and political campaign against the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority in the occupied territories. The Palestinian people are living on a daily basis under conditions of war — a war that is being waged by the Israeli war machine. This has led to an unprecedented deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

I do not believe that I need to go into detail as concerns the suffering inflicted on the Palestinian people as a result of those arbitrary practices, which include blockades, starvation, murder, displacement, the demolition of houses, the destruction of Arab land and extra-judicial killings. I am confident that the Committee is fully aware of the situation, a fact which stresses the need once again to provide an international mechanism to protect the Palestinian people and to guarantee their fundamental and legitimate rights, which are guaranteed by the relevant international agreements and instruments and by humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Israel has exploited the fact that the focus of various public sectors of the world has been on the military, political and information campaign led by the United States against terrorism, and it has reoccupied a number of Palestinian towns and villages that fall under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority. It has carried out massacres against the civilian population in an attempt to impose a fait accompli and create a new reality on the ground, which could lead, as the Israeli authorities presume, to the imposition of an Israeli peace on the region, or to a "no peace, no war" situation. This would be ideal for Israel and would serve its hegemonic and colonialist interests.

It is important in this connection to stress the fact that any attempt to marginalize or freeze the Palestinian issue, which is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, or to allow the Palestinian people to remain the victims of Israel's bloody practices, would lead to further tension and instability in the region. States that play a key role on the international scene must realize

that a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue would serve the vital and fundamental interests of the region and of the world.

The Arab League welcomes the statement made by President Bush concerning the right of Palestinians to establish their own state and his reaffirmation of the validity of the relevant internationally binding resolutions in the quest for a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of the Middle East.

We also welcome the statement by the Secretary of State of the United States, Mr. Colin Powell, containing the basic elements of the United States' vision of the peace process in the Middle East, which is based on the termination of Israeli occupation, in conformity with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace, as well as the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state.

While we consider Mr. Fall's statement to be positive and balanced, we nonetheless stress the need for the American Administration to adopt an effective stance that can be translated into concrete action. We would also warn against Israeli attempts to stand in the way of any American move designed to implement this vision. Israel's recent escalation of the process of killing and destruction is an attempt to pre-empt and to abort this initiative.

We have followed with great interest the international developments resulting from the terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September, which led to enormous human and economic losses. The member States of the League of Arab States condemned those murderous terrorist attacks against civilians, considering them to be contrary to the teachings of divine religions and to all human and ethical values. But while we condemn those operations, we categorically reject any attempt to link terrorism with the true Islamic religion, which, throughout history, has made a constructive and continuous contribution to the enrichment of human civilization.

We stress the need to differentiate between terrorist operations and the legitimate right to resistance to end occupation and ensure the right to self-determination. The international community must ensure that the Palestinian people are not deprived of the rights guaranteed them by international instruments and agreements. The Palestinian people are victims of the organized State terrorism practised daily by the Government of Israel. They have the indisputable, inalienable right to resist that terrorism.

Recently, there have been many allegations and claims concerning a so-called cultural divide and a clash of civilizations. As heirs to distinguished and time-honoured civilization and culture, we call for dialogue among civilizations based on understanding, mutual respect, coexistence and tolerance. We believe that such insinuations and allegations in the global mass media are tantamount to intellectual terrorism against peoples of the third world in general, and against the Arab and Islamic peoples in particular. Any talk about the supremacy of one civilization over another foments racist and chauvinistic tendencies which we thought would be swept away in the twenty-first century along with the remnants of colonialist mentalities.

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is an appropriate moment to make an urgent appeal to all peoples and Governments to stand by the Palestinian people and their national leadership until they regain their right to freedom, stability and self-determination, rights enjoyed by all other peoples. That would lead to stability and security in the region and throughout the world, and would defeat extremist and terrorist elements.

The Chairman (*interpretation from the French*): I request Mr. Hisham Abbas to convey to Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important message.

I now give the floor to Mr. Don Betz, who will make a statement on behalf of the international network of non-governmental organizations on the question of Palestine.

Mr. Betz: I am grateful for this opportunity to participate on behalf of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the NGO network on the question of Palestine. Other representatives of the network, which has a true global reach, are present in the gallery today. Earlier today, fellow NGO spokespersons joined the United Nations ceremonies in Geneva. We are honoured to be here.

Last year at this time, seated here in this Chamber, I said that it was a moment of unparalleled peril for the Palestinian people. The new intifada was then 62 days old, and the all too familiar pattern of

escalating violence had already produced mounting Palestinian casualties. At that time, we NGOs called for closer collaboration with the United Nations and for international protection for the people of Palestine on the ground. Twelve months later, the danger is more acute.

A systematic pattern of repression cannot be justified simply because it is familiar. Measures taken by the Israeli occupation forces, both military and civilian, are indefensible except to those who proclaim that Palestine is a mortal threat to the State of Israel, recognized as the fifth most potent military Power in the world today. The protracted Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has manifested itself in dramatic ways recently, with tanks flattening cars and grinding up narrow streets in West Bank towns. The occupation also lives in a thousand humiliations each day and in the 260 Israeli checkpoints which render Palestine a disconnected collection of isolated islands. These realities and much more are perpetual reminders for the Palestinians that their lives remain controlled, as they have been for the 34 years of the longest occupation in contemporary international politics.

But now, the numbing events of 11 September and the subsequent United-States-led war on international terrorism have propelled the question of Palestine onto centre stage of popular discussion. A dramatic change in the constellation of power and influence is under way in the region. As at few times in the recent past, the global public, especially in the United States, is asking questions about the occupation of Palestine, about its historical background and about the possible resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Importantly, these are issues the general public has not raised before. We believe that the mainstream public is ready to understand, perhaps for the first time, the stark reality of the question of Palestine. We believe that this is a teachable moment, a true global learning opportunity with major implications, if effectively executed, for any sustained peace initiative. A practical, immediate plan of action should include a comprehensive, coordinated and lasting campaign of information to provide the public with a true and clear picture of the Israeli occupation and of the legitimate Palestinian resistance to that occupation.

Now is the time for the United Nations, Member States and NGOs to actively collaborate once again and tell the story of Palestine as if for the first time. The tragedy of 11 September has launched a new dynamic for pursuing peace in the Middle East.

As active members of civil society, NGOs have demonstrated their commitment and their positive collaboration with the United Nations since the very first NGOs were identified by the United Nations during its preparation for the 1983 International Conference on the Question of Palestine. Over the ensuing 20 years, the emerging NGO network has focused on the full implementation of United Nations resolutions as the only sound basis for true peace.

Our immediate priority must be the most fundamental: to protect the people. Over the past year, several proposals have suggested the placement of external witnesses in Palestine. Various terms are used: unarmed international observers, international presence, international monitors, civilian and governmental presence, among others. Regardless of what they are called, the role of such witnesses is vital. Given the overwhelming military superiority and coercive power available to the State of Israel, the Palestinians, living on but a remnant of the 1947 Palestine under the British mandate, are at grave risk every day. The safety and security of the Palestinian people are a true international obligation, as is accepted by the United Nations, and it is incumbent upon all States to quite literally protect these people. This responsibility will be on the agenda, as has been mentioned, on 5 December at the meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

But we believe that the international obligation does not stop there. The United Nations and Member States must persist in requiring the fulfilment of the relevant resolutions well known to all of us, including General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III) and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). And we believe that an integral part of protection for Palestinians is exceptional, sustained support for NGOs, the United Nations and government agencies that are on the ground actively aiding the people.

As I said, the occupation of Palestine and the accompanying repression of the Palestinian people living there are not well understood by the public. The United Nations, NGOs and others still have serious work to do to transform what we call common public misperceptions. One such misperception is that the whole of Palestine is, in fact, Israeli territory and that

whatever Israel decides to "give" to the Palestinians is out of generosity and not a matter of law and right. Fundamentals must be stated and repeated. Minds and hearts need to be won.

Another pervasive misperception is that Palestinians are the aggressors and that it is Israel that is defending its homeland from a maniacal people. But who ever publicly asks these simple questions: why is there an intifada, why are the Palestinians mired in conflict with Israel, why has the conflict continued for so many years? Rarely are the Palestinians depicted in public discourse as an occupied people struggling to establish their sovereignty in an independent State on a fraction of original Palestine.

When these myths are challenged, when the realities of the question of Palestine are effectively communicated, we believe that the mainstream public will comprehend what is happening, perhaps for the first time. These decent, non-politicized citizens understand that something is not right, and that it has not been right for many years. The public is ready to know more, and is able to ask Governments for more answers. When it has a sense of the occupation and of the reasons why Palestinians have resisted for many generations, the public begins to understand that the status quo cannot stand if peace is the actual goal.

The illegal Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank and Gaza continues unabated. There have been many references this morning to the statement made on 19 November by the United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and we all agree that it was significant. But also significant for us was that within moments of that statement, which outlined parameters for peace in the Middle East, the Israeli authorities responded with new plans for increased settlement growth, and Israel Defence Force bulldozers demolished more Palestinian homes and destroyed more of those precious trees in a defiant display of power and control.

The latest Israeli justification of continued settlement proliferation is that the freeze on settlements was conditional on the good behaviour of Palestinians, as judged by the Israeli Government. The essential reality is that in 1967 there were no settlements and no settlers in the West Bank or Gaza. Despite their prohibition under international law, the settlements now number in the hundreds and the settlers in the hundred thousands. The efficacy of the rule of law has sustained another blow. These "facts on the ground" are clear obstacles to peace.

As non-governmental organizations, we have supported the recognition of the right of return for Palestinian refugees. But that right does not imply or mean the eradication of the State of Israel, and Israel should not exaggerate the issue to the point of blocking a possible solution. But we believe that the right of return does indeed suggest that, at an absolute minimum, there must be apologies and fair compensation according to the law, because that is right and just. Yet Israel has never offered a single expression of regret or remorse, or even made an indirect admission that Israelis have built their State, their homeland and their lives upon someone else's home and someone else's history.

Most immediately, the need is for protection. The suffocating control that Israel and the Israel Defence Force exercise over Palestinians every day must end. The deaths last week of five children as a result of a device purposely placed in a Palestinian refugee camp by the occupying army stunned even the most hardened veterans of this conflict. International monitors, including those from the United Nations and governmental and non-governmental organizations, must observe and, hopefully, prevent the violation of human rights by all parties. As one of our Israeli NGOs stated recently, only international monitoring can create a path out of the circle of violence, counter-violence, revenge and counter-revenge.

Only when calm is restored can the international community proceed with ending the occupation and vigorously pursue the establishment of what we are all here for: an independent Palestinian State, within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem at its capital, side by side with the Israel, in fulfilment of United Nations resolutions.

Finally, we believe that the question of Palestine is a human issue. It will be justly resolved only when peace and security are daily realities for Palestinians and for Israelis. The quest is simple yet complex: it is the quest to live a normal life. To that end, both the United Nations and its NGO network partners must renew their common commitment, guided by United Nations resolutions, to persist in the work of building peace — peace that has so far proved elusive — the foundation of a normal life.

In the past, the United Nations and the NGO network have been described by a British newspaper as the "guardian angels" of the Palestinian people. Since 1983, when the United Nations International Conference on the Question of Palestine took place, NGOs, as a network, have joined with the United Nations in championing the rights of the Palestinian people. Now we have an exceptional historic opportunity to collaboratively tell the story of the Palestinian people to an awakened United States and global public and to articulate a clear pathway to peace.

As NGOs on the question of Palestine, we persist in our commitment never to be idle, dispassionate or silent. We embrace the opportunity to connect with the United Nations in fresh and effective ways on behalf of the Palestinian people and in the relentless pursuit of true peace.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank Mr. Don Betz for the valuable contribution that non-governmental organizations have always made to the work of the Committee.

I now have the pleasure to announce that the Committee has received many messages of support and solidarity from many heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations. The texts of these messages will be published in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights, but I would like to read out the list of names of those who have sent them.

We have received messages from the following heads of State: His Excellency Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria; His Excellency Mr. Jorge Quiroga Ramírez, President of the Republic of Bolivia; His Excellency Mr. Fernando Henrique Cardoso, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil; His Excellency Mr. Ricardo Carlos Escobar, President of the Republic of Chile; His Excellency Mr. Glafcos Clerides, President of the Republic of Cyprus; His Excellency Mr. Kim Jong Nam, President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt; His Excellency General Lansana Conté, President of the Republic of Guinea; His Excellency Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, President of the Republic of Guyana; Her Excellency Ms. Megawati Soekarnoputri, President of the Republic of Indonesia; His Excellency Mr. Seyed Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran; His Majesty Abdullah Bin Al Hussein, King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, President of the Republic of Maldives; His Majesty Mohammed VI, King of the Kingdom of Morocco; His Excellency Mr. Sam Nujoma, President of the Republic of Namibia; His Excellency General Pervez Musharraf, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; His Excellency Mr. Aleksander Kwasniewski, President of the Republic of Poland; His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar; His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation; His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, President of the Republic of Senegal; His Excellency Mr. Rudolf Schuster, President of the Slovak Republic; Her Excellency Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; His Excellency Lieutenant General Omer Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir, President of the Republic of the Sudan; His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia; His Excellency Mr. Ahmet Necdet Sezer, President of the Republic of Turkey; and His Excellency Mr. Tran Duc Luong, President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.

We have also received messages from the following heads of Government: His Excellency Mr. Gennady Novitsky, Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus; His Excellency Zhu Rongji, Prime Minister of the Council of State of the People's Republic of China; His Excellency Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of the Republic of India; His Excellency Mr. Mahathir Mohamad, Prime Minister of Malaysia; His Excellency Mr. Edward Fenech Adami, Prime Minister of Malta; and His Excellency Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand.

We have also received messages from the following Ministers for Foreign Affairs: His Excellency Mr. Vilayat Mukhtar ogly Guliyev, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan; His Excellency Youssouf Ouédraogo, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso; Her Excellency Ms. Makiko Tanaka, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan; Her Excellency Ms. Lila Ratsifandriamanana, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Madagascar; His Excellency Mr. Mircea Geoana, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania; His Excellency Mr. Farouk Al-Shara',

Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic; and His Excellency Mr. Anatoliy Zlenko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

The Governments of Burundi, Uruguay and Venezuela have also sent messages.

Turning to intergovernmental organizations, we have received messages from the European Union; Mr. Amara Essy, Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity; and Mr. Abdelouahed Belkeziz, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

We have received a message from Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Messages have also been sent by the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs): the Indo-Arab Friendship Association; the International Progress Organization; the International Studies Association; the Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue; and the Society of Inash El-Usra, of Al-Bireh, Palestine.

We have thus received a total of some 51 messages from heads of State, heads of Government, Governments, ministers, international organizations and NGOs, which are clear indications of solidarity with and support for the Palestinian people.

On behalf of the Committee, I should therefore like to express our sincere thanks to the heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations I have just mentioned, as well as to all participants for their tireless efforts to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine, and especially for the constant support they have always given to the mandated activities of our Committee.

The statements that we have heard and the messages of solidarity that we have received today amply demonstrate the determination of the international community to move forward to establish peace in the Middle East and to enable the Palestinian people to enjoy its inalienable rights on the basis of the United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy. I can assure everyone here that all the members of the Committee will spare no effort to attain those objectives.

I now have the pleasure of calling on His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, Head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine Liberation Organization) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure, at the close of this commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, to express to you, Sir, and to all the other members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, our deep thanks for your constant efforts to support the struggle of the Palestinian people to attain its legitimate national rights.

I would like also to thank the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council for the month of November for joining today's commemoration of the International Day. I thank them for their statements, in which they expressed the firm wish that all high-level officials and Members of the United Nations should continue to exert their utmost effort to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict — the core of which is the question of Palestine — in order to ensure stability and security on the basis of resolutions of international legitimacy.

It is also a pleasure on this occasion to express my thanks and appreciation to the heads of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States and non-governmental organizations for their messages and for their solidarity with the Palestinian people and their just cause.

My thanks go also to all the heads of State or Government and the ministers who have sent messages expressing full and firm solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle to put an end to Israeli occupation and to establish an independent, sovereign Palestinian State.

That international unanimity is evidence of the clear desire of peoples all over the world for peace and security in the Middle East, now that in recent months the after the world has witnessed the consequences of not dealing in time with such regional conflicts and international problems, and of failing to address such issues before they deteriorate and become extremely difficult to solve. They then engender a sense of bitterness and hatred, which inevitably leads to violence and ultimately to the emergence of terrorism.

Perhaps we are now witnessing a new era of international solidarity in solving the problem of terrorism. But we must first make a serious attempt to solve regional conflicts in a spirit of justice and equity and to ensure the legitimate rights of peoples. Human rights and the right to self-determination should be respected, and hegemony and domination should be rejected. This should be done through direct intervention by the United Nations and its machinery.

In closing, I would like to thank all participants for their presence and for taking part in this event.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Before adjourning the meeting, I wish first of all to convey the Committee's thanks to the delegations of Malta and of Tunisia, which are representing the Committee at, respectively, the Vienna and Geneva commemorations of the International Day of Solidarity.

My thanks go next to the members of the staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department of Conference Services, the Department of Public Information and everyone else who has been working behind the scenes, visibly or invisibly, to organize and ensure the success of today's meeting.

This year, owing to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and, especially, to the special security measures in place in New York and at Headquarters, the exhibition of Palestinian art and the reception cannot take place as usual. However, I direct participants' attention to the exhibit specially set up in this Chamber for today's meeting, which is also on view as part of the permanent display on Palestine on the third floor of this building.

Also, immediately following this meeting, two videotapes will be screened in this Chamber. The first, entitled *Gaza Under Siege*, portrays life in the Gaza Strip since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa intifada. The second, entitled *Mahmoud Darwish: As the Land is the Language*, describes how the best known Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish, portrays the injuries to and the heritage of his people. All those present are cordially invited to view these videotapes, on which additional information will be provided.

Once again, I wish to thank all those present for their attention and for their participation.

The meeting rose at 12.55 a.m.